

ONCE UPON A TIME - 'LALLA', A Children's Magazine in Hindi

- PRAMILA SHARMA

The Lalla-Balpatrika, a children's magazine from Allahabad, was edited by the renowned cartoonist 'Shiksharthi'. This 'illustrated children's magazine' was published with a view to promoting the mental development of children, because according to 'Shiksharthi', the editor, presenting reading material to children without illustrations is as good as giving them unsalted *khichdi*! This magazine had a specific objective. The *Lalla* completed its two years of publication in December 1949. In that issue Shiksharthi wrote in the column "About Lalla" as follows:

"This *Lalla* follows a distinct path. As such, we are not professionals. No matter how many losses we may have to suffer, we shall give only selective material in the *Lalla*. We are fully aware that what we give to our children today to read, is extremely important for the future of the country..."

The annual subscription of this magazine was Rs.4, with a single copy priced at 6 annas. The special features of this 32 page magazine were

the poems by Sohanlal Dwivedi and illustrations by Ramachandra Shukla. The prominent note was one of patriotism. For instance, the cover page of the issue of January 1948 shows a map of India hung on the wall, and a chubby boy in a Gandhi cap looking at the map with a dog standing on hind legs by his side. The boy is carrying in his hand a wooden sword. Below it there are two lines of a poem printed in white letters on a black board.

The inside cover page has the picture of the affectionate 'Ba' (Kasturba). On the first page is a line-drawing of 'Bapu' (Gandhiji), and it calls upon children to observe Gandhiji's first death anniversary as the *Sarvodaya Day*, exhorting them to follow the path of Bapu by living in mutual harmony. Interesting incidents from Gandhiji's life have also been mentioned. *Bapu's Message* is a very simple and lovely poem by Shri Shobhit. Sohanlal Dwivedi's poem, *Veer Jawahar* has been published under the title "*Hum kya Gayen.*" There is a beautiful cartoon of Rajaji's dark glasses. The cartoon has been printed along with a poem. Both the cartoon and the poem are by Shiksharthi. The child in the cartoon wears a big Gandhi cap on his head and Rajaji's wonderful coloured spectacles.

The column *Soojh-boojh* (Imagination) contains questions, announcing prizes for the correct answers. *Hamari Jankari* (Our Knowledge) is a column which has a discussion about the honey-bee and the giraffe. In "Vigyan Lok", (World of Science) Dr. Balakrishna has written in a very simple style the article entitled "What is an Atom Bomb?" Accompanying the article is an illustration of a frightened man with a very long neck and a big head, wearing pointed shoes with the caption "Oh, God! The very mention of the Atom Bomb makes one's hair stand on end." Thus, the child reader is tempted to read even about such a serious subject.

A special feature of *Lalla* is that it has brought together the apparently different creative forms

of poetry, short story and illustrations with great efficiency and dexterity. Shiksharathi had the natural ability to do it efficiently, because he was well-versed in poetry, painting and fiction. From the point of view of Shiksharathi's literary accomplishments and the appraisal of his importance in the field of children's journalism, greater attention should be paid to this remarkable ability in him.

In another issue, a poem called "*Moti Haathi*" has been published along with six illustrations. In the first illustration, a boy is shown riding an elephant and going to school laughing. The *Chatwala* seated at the gate of the school is silent, but another child is puzzled by that sight. The second illustration shows merely the nameboard of the school. The elephant is sprawling, obstructing the gate, and one poor teacher stands there confounded. In the next illustration, the teacher is shown planning a strategy in consultation with the children, while the elephant has fallen asleep. In the fourth illustration, the children have settled down to their studies with their little writing boards, and the teacher smears ink on the back of the elephant. In the next picture, the teacher is solving a multiplication sum on the back of the elephant, with a stick in his hand. At the end of the poem, a small elephant calf, in a vest and underwear, is shown skipping on the rope.

The *Lalla* made an attempt to link children with the national mainstream and motivated them to participate in the tasks of national reconstruction. The issue of August 15, 1949, carries a slogan in bold letters: 'There is freedom if there is food'. Below it is a boy squatting on a stool and writing on the blackboard: 'Good wishes for August 15' and on the last page, under the title "That is something" the real meaning of freedom has been explained.

Asli Azadi Kab
Jab na rahe bhooke sab

Upje anaaj khoob
Apna ho raaj khoob
Anna Upjana sab
Pait bhar khana sab
Ab hai Azad hum
Khet me de khaad hum

(When is there real freedom?

When there's hunger for none.

Let there be a lot of food

Then we would truly rule.

Let everyone grow food,

And eat a lot of food.

Now we are all free

Let us put manure in the fields.)

The inside pages also contain the poems "Let us not waste food" and "Let us grow more food". The editor has published patriotic songs like "We love our flag" and also an expressive photograph of Gandhiji. But the most interesting fact is that the children have also been informed about the partition of the country which had caused pain to everyone. There is a picture of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan with a small girl on his lap. The caption of the picture is: "Independence Day of Pakistan." The picture is a reminder of the fact 'as it were' that Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan who helped to bring independence for India and Pakistan was in prison even on Independence Day. On the last page of the issue there is a smiling picture of Abul Kalam Azad with a quotation from him at the bottom. Thereby the edition gives its own comment on the future language policy of the Government of India: "The honourable Education Minister of the Government of India, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad has stated that with the creation of Pakistan, Urdu no longer has any place here, only the Devnagari script can enjoy a proud place." This is an expression of 'Shiksharathi's' respect for Hindi as the national language, and shows how proud he was of it.

As a matter of fact, each issue of this magazine can be regarded as an encouragement for nation building. For example, the issue of January, 1950, expresses national joy from the cover page itself. It carried the picture of a boy dressed in kurta-pyjama, a Jawahar jacket and a Gandhi cap with the Tricolour in his right hand. By his side is a smiling girl, expressing joy through her entire posture. The boy has in his left hand a laughing picture of Gandhiji. Inside the magazine, there are poems in the first two pages.

*Aaj ki subah liye huae nayi nayi kiran
Aaj ki subah liye navin jyoti ka jharan
Aaj ki subah navin zindagi liye huae
Aaj ki subah bari suhavani hriday - haran muskura
Phool muskura suna rahe navin baat hai-
Aaj Prajatantra ka pratham pratham prabhat hai*

(Today's morning has new rays of light,
Today's morning has the spring of flame bright,
Today's morning has the gift of new life
Today's morning is lovely and heart's delight.
The smiling flowers are whispering something too,
Today is the first dawn of our republic new.)

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*Naye varsh me nayi jyoti se chamke kona
Nikhare khara naya bharat jyon tapa-ta paya sona
Naye varsh me naye roop se aazadi hai aayi
Phoole phale bhara pura ho bharat varsh badhahi*

(In the New Year with new light every corner is lit,
Gleaming is new Bharat like gold heated and made bright

In the New Year freedom has come in new form
May Bharat prosper and thrive, felicitations to all)

With a view to acquaint children with the story of India, there is an article entitled "The Ajanta Caves" written in very simple language. The writer is Jagdish Gupta who possesses expert knowledge about archaeology and painting. A thoughtful article by Bhagwan Din describes that freedom which is easily available to all human beings as true freedom.

Entertainment seems to have gradually become more important in the issues of the year 1951, with the voice of patriotism being relegated into the background. For instance, in the August issue of the year, there is nothing on the cover page or in the selection of reading matter that can be related to Independence Day. Only, there is a half-page article called "Lokamanya Tilak's Student Life" written by Vaidyanath Dubey. Even the practice of publishing pictures of the 'Builders of the Nation' has not been followed. In the issue of October 1951 there is only a small line drawing of Gandhiji. However, there is a one-page article entitled "Monkey's Disciple." At this stage, the magazine has undergone many changes.

The *Lalla* deserves to be given particular attention because of its short poems. It has been often remarked that in Hindi children's literature, established writers have not contributed much by way of writing nursery rhymes. This may be true in the case of Jai Shankar Prasad. But many other established writers, like Hari Audh, Nirala, Shivpujan Sahay, Govind Ballabh Pant and others have written good children's literature. Probably, Prasad too would have written children's poems had he not died prematurely.

The *Lalla* contains a number of nursery rhymes which are easy to remember and can be

sung with great delight while playing. Since these rhymes are meant for very young children, they have been printed in big types. Some of them are:

(Vol. II No. 151)

*Mere Pille mat ho dang
Dek Zara Holi ka rang*

(My little puppy don't you wonder
Just watch and see the Holi's colour)

*Jal ki chiriyan
Dhan ki chiriyan
Kuch bhari kuch
Halki chiriyan
Bhaati chiriyan gatee chiriyan
Nach dikha, sukh paati chiriyan*

(Bird of water
Bird of land
Some are heavy
Some very light
Lovely birds
Singing birds
Dance for you
The happy birds) (Vol. II No. 16)

Famous folk poems like "The Far away Moon" have also been published in this magazine. In fact there are quite a few poems for children with the heading: 'To be learnt by heart by children'. Those poems became all the more interesting because of colourful printing. Kedar is a painter who not only made illustrations for the *Lalla* but also wrote beautiful poems under the pen-name Chitera.

*Dham dham dham dham
Dham dham dham
Fairies dance
Chham chham chham*

*Wings are glowing
Cham cham cham
When fast we think
We do see them.*

The names of the poets have not been mentioned along with these poems. Hence, it is natural to imagine that the writer of these poems was Shiksharthi himself.

Shiksharthi's beautiful drawings are really a great achievement for this magazine. At the same time, he gave plenty of scope to new artists as well. They were Ramachandra Skukla, Jagdish Kedar, Ismail, Krishna Kant, and with them Shiksharthi was himself engaged in art-work for the magazine. In the issue of July 1950 was a photograph of Ramchandra Shukla who was a great favourite of the readers of the *Lalla*.

This magazine also carried a small item called *Chitrakari Khel Hai* (Painting is fun) which explained simple ways of drawing pictures. The editor also requested the contributors to send illustrations or photographs along with their writings. The illustrations in the magazine gave a new life to it and made it immensely attractive. Shiksharthi himself made an illustration called "The Horse and the Rider" which became very popular with children because it could also be seen upside down.

The picture of the horse published in No. 16, vol. II, becomes the picture of a boxing rider when seen upside down. The issue of December, 1949, carries the pictures of 14 animals in each of which the artist has left some mistake which the children were expected to detect. In the issue of January, 1950, there are illustrations of five fruits and vegetables. Each picture is then split into two parts, and the children are asked to name each of them. The issue of December 1952, has a feature called *Chitron ki Aankham-ichauli* (The blind bluff in pictures). There is a flower vase on the top and at the bottom, two boys with their cat, searching for their sisters

who are hiding in the flower-vase. Similarly, there is a picture resembling the map of Africa in which are hidden 16 faces (July 1952). The magazine published a feature called *Garbar jhala* (A pretty kettle of fish) with a view to developing the power of observation among children and arouse in them interest in painting at the same time. In the issue of September, 1952, there was an interesting and picturesque advertisement to increase the number of subscribers. It was called "The matter of the head", with the name Lalla written on the head of a child, inviting thereby intelligent boys to subscribe to the *Lalla* which was already in the minds of the children.

With a view to attracting children to the magic of colours, the magazine published some outline drawings which children were asked to colour the way they liked. The issue of May, 1951 has a very interesting picture of a bathing elephant.

Ramachandra Shukla has shown to the readers easy ways to draw pictures. From this point of view, the issue of February 1950 deserves a special mention.

The readers have seen the art of Ramachandra Shukla in many issues of the *Lalla*. He teaches at the Teachers' Training College of the Kashi Hindu University. He is well-versed in the

art of painting. He has shown in this issue (February, 1950) the easy method of drawing a picture of three sisters. It would all become automatically clear by looking at the 6 accompanying drawings.

As a result of the easy methods of drawing pictures shown in the *Lalla*, many of its child readers turned into artists. These drawing lessons particularly increased children's general knowledge. Writers like Prabhakar Machwe, Sohanlal Dwivedi, Swarna Kiran, Jagdish Gupta contributed to this magazine. It also published some incidents from the life of Nirala (September, 1951). It published a picture of the poet laureate Maithili Saran Gupt on art paper and thus acquainted the young readers with men of literature.

It was sad to discover that such a valuable magazine did not find even a mention in the Hindi *Patrakarita Kosh*. Children's literature plays an important role in nation-building. This point cannot be disputed. It was in this spirit that Babu Shivpujan Sahay, Ramkrishna Benipuri and other prominent writers had taken to literary journalism and children's journalism. It is necessary to conduct serious studies of magazines like the *Lalla* and to create children's centres in the country where children can enjoy reading such magazines themselves.

Picture books offer a child new ways of seeing and the world - its wonders, its magic, its fun - and then again new ways of seeing the same thing. Type, printing, paper and building also contribute to the artistic quality of the book.

-Lee Wyndham